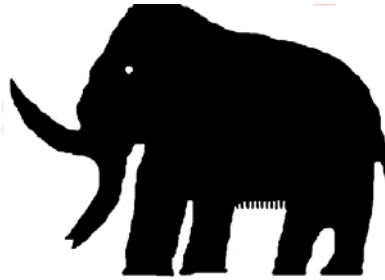


The Woolly Mammoth

Edward I. Maxwell



The closest relative of the woolly mammoth is the Asian elephant. The main difference between the two is that the mammoth had an incredible coat of fur, made up of an outer layer of coarse “guard hair” with an inner layer of curly wool. The last known group of mammoths died off, or became extinct, around 4,000 years ago. The mammoth roamed the northern lands of the world during a period known as the Ice Age. It was among the largest land mammals to roam the earth. The mammoth was a tough beast and was able to endure extreme weather conditions and frigid temperatures.

The mammoth shared these northern territories with other mammals during the Ice Age. The most important mammal to interact with the mammoth, however, was the human. When the mammoths were at their greatest numbers, humans mainly hunted animals and foraged for food. These hunters would follow herds of animals over incredibly long distances in order to hunt them. The woolly mammoth provided a great amount of food and other important things for these humans. The fur, for example, could be used to make coats and blankets that would help keep out the cold in the icy environment. Bones from the mammoth could be used to make tools and weapons. Because one mammoth provided so many useful things to a large group of people, early humans would follow the herds wherever they went. There is even a theory that the humans followed the mammoth over a land-bridge from Asia into the Americas.

How do we know that the mammoth existed? Scientists have found countless mammoth fossils, or bones, all over the world. In fact, scientists have even found very well-preserved, or mummified, mammoth bodies in sheets of ice. These mummified remains are part of the reason scientists came to know exactly how hairy and woolly the mammoths actually were.

Another reason scientists know so much about mammoths is that early humans painted pictures of them on cave walls. These pictures depicted hunting parties chasing after mammoth herds and trying to bring down the great beasts with spears.

Certain features of the woolly mammoth allowed it to survive very well in this harsh environment. The most obvious feature was, of course, its hair and wool. This coat helped the mammoth maintain a warm and stable body temperature no matter how cold the landscape became. The coarse hair would keep ice and frost from collecting too close to the mammoth's body, which left the softer, wool inner-layer free to keep the animal extra warm. Another feature was the mammoth's large tusks. These tusks were very long and curved out wide from the mammoth's head. It was able to use these tusks for protection. Besides humans, there were other predators the mammoth had to face. The American lion was an incredibly large predatory cat. The mammoth's tusks could be swung into an attacking lion to keep the predator away or even injure it. Mammoths driven to stand and fight or protect their young might even have charged humans with their large tusks, looking to make a crushing blow.

Humans were very smart hunters, however. Hunting in large parties, the humans would most likely isolate a mammoth from its herd, and attack it all at once in great numbers. Wielding their spears expertly, the humans would bring the mammoth down as quickly as possible, and then set about butchering it with stone scraping tools, axes and knives. It is believed that the success of human hunters was a large part of why the mammoth became extinct. Another reason had to do with the climate. The Ice Age did not last forever. The earth's temperature rose again. The glacial ice receded, and many scientists believe the mammoth was not well suited for the warmer weather. The environment that had once been so hospitable to a great animal very well-adapted to the frigid conditions gradually became more hostile. Finally, the last group of mammoths died off 4,000 years ago. Now all that remain of the mammoth are fossilized bones and mummified mammoth bodies that were frozen over a long time ago.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is the woolly mammoth?

- A a picture painted on cave walls by early humans
- B a land-bridge that humans may have followed from Asia into the Americas
- C a large land mammal that died off around 4,000 years ago
- D a large predatory cat that lived in the Americas during the Ice Age

2. What does this passage describe?

- A This passage describes the spears that early humans used.
- B This passage describes what happened to the American lion when the Ice Age ended.
- C This passage describes the Asian elephant.
- D This passage describes woolly mammoths.

3. Woolly mammoths had features that helped them live in a harsh environment.

What evidence from the passage supports this statement?

- A The hair on the coat of woolly mammoths kept ice from collecting too close to their bodies.
- B The last known group of woolly mammoths died off around 4,000 years ago.
- C Pictures on cave walls show hunting parties chasing after herds of woolly mammoths.
- D All that now remains of woolly mammoths are fossilized bones and mummified bodies.

4. What made the environment of woolly mammoths harsh?

- A rising temperatures and Asian elephants
- B cold weather and predators such as humans and lions
- C coats made up of coarse hair and a softer inner-layer
- D a land-bridge that connected Asia with the Americas

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A the Ice Age, how it began and ended, and its effect on the American lion and early humans
- B the woolly mammoth, how early humans interacted with it, and why it may have died off
- C the possible reasons that woolly mammoths died off around 4,000 years ago
- D the mammoth fossils that scientists have found and what scientists have learned from those fossils

6. Read the following sentence: "The fur, for example, could be used to make coats and blankets that would help keep out the cold in the icy **environment**."

What does the word "**environment**" mean?

- A the study of animal bones and mummified bodies
- B a cave in which people have painted pictures of woolly mammoths
- C a coat with coarse hair on the outside and curly wool on the inside
- D the place and conditions in which someone or something lives

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Humans continued to live after the Ice Age; _____, woolly mammoths did not.

- A as an illustration
- B in particular
- C however
- D third

8. Describe the tusks of the woolly mammoth.

9. How might the woolly mammoth have used its tusks for protection?

10. The passage describes the woolly mammoth as a "tough beast." What made it tough? Explain your answer using evidence from the passage.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 1070

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Suggested answer: The woolly mammoth's tusks were very long and curved out wide from the mammoth's head.

9. How might the woolly mammoth have used its tusks for protection?

Suggested answer: The woolly mammoth could have swung its tusks into attacking lions or used them to charge humans.

10. The passage describes the woolly mammoth as a "tough beast." What made it tough? Explain your answer using evidence from the passage.

Suggested answer: Answers may vary, as long as they are supported by the passage. After Questions 8 and 9, all students should be able to make the case that the woolly mammoth was tough because of the way it defended itself with its tusks. Students may also point out other indications of its toughness, such as its endurance of frigid weather conditions.